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CITY OF ATHENS, OHIO

September 17, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, District of Columbia 20554

RE: Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment, WC Docket No. 17-84; Accelerating Wireless Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment, WT Docket No. 17-79

Dear Ms. Dortch,

The City of Athens Ohio writes to express its concerns about the Federal Communications Commission's proposed Declaratory Ruling and Third Report and Order regarding state and local governance of small cell wireless infrastructure deployment. The City of Athens is the county seat of Athens County, Ohio, and is the home to Ohio University, the first public institution of higher learning of the Northwest Territory. It is a beacon of culture and economic activity in an otherwise depressed area of the state. Through a variety of initiatives the local community has pushed to increase broadband access and seek developing information-age companies to locate in the beautiful hills of SE Ohio.

While we appreciate the Commission's efforts to engage with local governments on this issue and share the Commission's goal of ensuring the growth of cutting-edge broadband services for all Americans, we remain deeply concerned about several provisions of this proposal. Local governments have an important responsibility to protect the health, safety and welfare of residents, and we are concerned that these preemption measures compromise that traditional authority and expose wireless infrastructure providers to unnecessary liability.

- **The FCC's proposed new collocation shot clock category is too extreme.** The proposal designates any preexisting structure, regardless of its design or suitability for attaching wireless equipment, as eligible for this new expedited 60 day shot clock. When paired with the FCC's previous decision exempting small wireless facilities from federal historic and environmental review, this places an unreasonable burden on local governments to prevent historic preservation, environmental, or safety harms to the community. The addition of up to three cubic feet of antenna and 28 cubic feet of additional equipment to a structure not originally designed to carry that equipment is substantial and may necessitate more review than the FCC has allowed in its proposal. Athens has a great amount of topography, varying road conditions, and 220 years of buried infrastructure that all must be considered during citing of new facilities in public rights-of-way.

- **The FCC's proposed definition of "effective prohibition" is overly broad.** The draft report and order proposes a definition of "effective prohibition" that invites challenges to long-standing local rights of way requirements unless they meet a subjective and unclear set of guidelines. While the Commission may have intended to preserve local review, this framing and definition of effective prohibition opens local governments to the likelihood of more, not less, conflict and litigation over requirements for aesthetics, spacing, and undergrounding. We regularly work with utilities that operate in our local area. They understand the unique nature of Athens and the meet the necessary local requirements, which are not particularly onerous. We do not have a problem of compliance now, and Athens' requirements do not add significant expense. This change would invite challenges from afar – from "corporate" offices of the various utilities, unfamiliar with the local conditions.
- **The FCC's proposed recurring fee structure is an unreasonable overreach that will harm local policy innovation.** We disagree with the FCC's interpretation of "fair and reasonable compensation" as meaning approximately \$270 per small cell site. Local governments share the federal government's goal of ensuring affordable broadband access for every American, regardless of their income level or address. That is why many cities have worked to negotiate fair deals with wireless providers, which may exceed that number or provide additional benefits to the community. Additionally, the Commission has moved away from rate regulation in recent years. Why does it see fit to so narrowly dictate the rates charged by municipalities? In fact, a coalition of Ohio cities already worked with telecommunication industry partners to enshrine a limit on per site fees in the Ohio Revised Code. State and local laws are the appropriate vehicle to set fees for a particular geographic area, not a federal agency.

The City of Athens Ohio has worked with private business to build the best broadband infrastructure possible for our residents. We oppose this effort to restrict local authority and stymie local innovation, while limiting the obligations providers have to our community. We urge you to oppose this declaratory ruling and report and order.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SP', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Steve Patterson
Mayor